



LINCOLN CHAFEE

U.S. SENATOR

RHODE ISLAND

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Updated: January 10, 2005

CONTACT: Stephen Hourahan
202 224-6167

CHAFEE RETURNS FROM FACT-FINDING MISSION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

WASHINGTON, DC – Senator Chafee recently returned from his fact-finding mission to the Middle East, where he paid visits to Israel, Jordan, Iraq, Bahrain and Egypt. Upon his return, he made several observations about the “tenuous” security situation in Iraq, which has become much more unstable since his previous visit in October 2003.

Chafee was part of a bipartisan delegation of Senators, including Chuck Hagel of Nebraska, Joe Biden of Delaware and Dianne Feinstein of California on the six-day trip.



Senator Chafee and Senator Hagel attend a meeting with Iraqi Council President Ghazi Mashal Ajil al-Yawar.

In Iraq, he met with the American Ambassador to Iraq John Negroponte, Chief of the Office of Security Transition Lieutenant General David H. Petraeus and other commanders of ground forces. In addition, Chafee met with Iraqi Council President Ghazi Mashal Ajil al-Yawar, and attended meetings with Sunni political leaders. He also met with U.N. Special Representative Jehangir Quazi, and members of the Election Team, including U.N. Electoral Advisor Carlos Valenzuela. Chafee later traveled to the city of Fallujah, where he met with Marines from Rhode Island, and later attended a dinner with Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi.

Chafee commented on several significant changes in Iraq since his visit one year ago. Specifically, he noted that due to security concerns along the ten-mile road to Baghdad International Airport, his group was unable to use the outlet, and instead was forced to travel by Blackhawk helicopter. Additionally, he was unable to visit local neighborhoods in Baghdad, or visit the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, as he was able to do on his previous trip.

The Senator also commented on the deteriorating security situation within the Green Zone, a highly fortified, secure section of Baghdad, which houses the Iraqi government, U.S. military, and other foreign government administrations.

Although the Senator described the security situation in Iraq as troubling, he continues to support timely elections in Iraq, and is in the process of exploring various options for ensuring that these elections are held in an efficient, successful manner.

In Jordan, Chafee met with Jordanian King Abdullah bin al-Hussein II, and in Bahrain met with King Hamad and was involved in meetings with delegations from the United Kingdom, France and Iraq. Officials from Yemen and Saudi Arabia were also in attendance. Chafee and the U.S. delegation also visited Egypt, where in Cairo he met with President Mubarak before returning to the United States. Discussions in these meetings touched on the reconstruction of Iraq as well as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Chafee Sees Historic Opportunity for Mideast Peace

After separate meetings with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian President-elect Mahmoud Abbas, Senator Chafee said that the potential exists for progress in the Middle East peace process.

The opportunity presents itself with the death of Yassar Arafat and the election of Abbas on January 9. Senator Chafee described Abbas (known as Abu Mazen) as a very capable, insightful man whom he believes is committed to the peace

process. After his meeting with Ariel Sharon, the Senator concluded that the Prime Minister recognizes the opportunity that exists for serious, productive talks with the Palestinians.

“I see a real opportunity and momentum for peace,” Senator Chafee said. He has called upon the Bush Administration to fully engage in the process and bring the two sides back to the negotiating table.

The meetings were held during a two-day visit to Jerusalem and Ramallah, in the West Bank.



Senator Chafee meets with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon



Senator Chafee poses with Palestinian President-elect Mahmoud Abbas

####